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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LABOR AND THE FARMS

SIR,—The Editor's article in the May number is excellent, as usual, but in the section under the caption of "Back to the Land," the Editor has strayed from topics that he is familiar with to a topic that is a new acquaintance.

He says "that increasing the food supply is simpler than raising and equipping an army." He recommends conservation. We can conserve if we must.

The distillers say that there would be a great loss of revenue if we forbid the use of grain for their purposes.

We would more than make up the loss either "in meal or in malt"; the revenue from distilled grain would not equal the price of the whisky, so the people would be the gainers. Money spent for whisky could be spent more profitably in other directions. There will be a greater shortage of grain next year than in this. The yield of wheat in this country is about thirteen bushels per acre; Germany, with very poor lands, yields thirty bushels. In efficient Germany the dealers in fertilizers are not allowed to cheat the farmers; in this land of the free the dealers may do their worst.

Some months ago a report from the New York Agricultural Station gave the results from using chemical fertilizers on land. When the station bought and mixed its own chemicals the result was very profitable; the fertilizers that were bought from dealers showed very little profit—this agrees with the general experience. Germany's fields must be in a bad way just now (for this small mercy let us be thankful) as the supply of foreign chemicals for fertilizers has been cut off.

It has been recommended by some who have voices in our national affairs, that unused land should be confiscated. The gentlemen alluded to probably know nothing about farming. There is no scarcity of land; thanks to the labor party and the Pacific slopers we have no laborers. Industrious Chinese and Japanese who know nothing of the eight-hour law, and who are more desirable than Sicilians or Greeks, would cultivate our idle acres. These people would not be employed in our munition factories at wages that farmers cannot pay unless they receive \$5 as a minimum price for their wheat, and proportionately for other products.

Provisions seem high already to consumers. There have been hysterical urgings by city people to plough up lawns and golf links and to cultivate the same. The golf players could hardly be induced to frequent the links if hoeing were the only recreation offered in return for their annual

subscription. A lady who has a nice place in Lenox received word from her foreman that he could not get any one to mow the lawn; the reply was, "plough the lawn and plant it with corn."

I succeeded in giving the use of five acres to be planted in potatoes. I hope and think it will turn out well, as it will have the benefit of good supervision. I have not been able, as yet, to find anyone to take more land.

It is to be hoped that the advice of Mr. J. Ogden Armour will be taken now (pp. 656-7). Surely no one is more competent to advise than he. Unless laborers can be found, we in the United States will face a shortage of farm products quite as serious as the shortage afflicting Europe. One would think that the German prisoners in France and England might work at husbandry.

In Bermuda there are about fifty interned Germans; they work in the onion and potato patches—get three shillings a day, and are apparently contented; they are certainly in good physical condition.

The American farmer (p. 659) cannot increase his production unless he have fields handy—he has always been reproached for trying to do more than he could do thoroughly; now he is urged to undertake more yet.

We are the worst farmers in the world. It is only lately that our farmers have ceased looking for virgin soil. The Genesee Valley was thought at one time to be inexhaustible wheat land, and Rochester was the Flour City (I think it is now called the Flower City—*tempora mutantur*, etc.). Mixed farming is now the rule in the Valley. Other fertile sections share the same experience. We "skin the land" as long as it will produce anything; the East is full of abandoned farms; the owners have gone West to look for fresh fields to skin.

Page 660: "The simple, inexpensive and perfectly practicable expedient of drainage would enable the yearly returns from the soil to be increased."

Drainage—sad to say—is so expensive that only the State or "gentlemen farmers" who have made their money in the "busy marts of trade" can afford to undertake the "simple expedient."

Page 661: "If it be lawful for the Government to draft men for a military army, it should be equally lawful to draft them for an industrial or an agricultural army." Conceded. Would the Government take them from the munition factories, from the banks, the printing offices, the custom houses, the post office, or whence?

"An industrial army of men and boys not qualified for military service, but quite able to do agricultural work, etc." This assumes that there is an army of men and boys who are unemployed; the fact is that one now rarely sees a tramp.

MOUNT KISCO, N. Y.

ROBERT W. LEONARD.

[We really cannot see that our courteous and interesting correspondent convicts us of a less familiar acquaintance with the agricultural problem than he himself enjoys. On the contrary, in most respects he confirms our opinions with the weight of his own expert authority. He cites but does not attempt to controvert our statement that to increase the food supply is simpler than to raise and equip an army, and he argues at length in support of our proposal for food conservation. The questions of prohibiting the use of grain for liquor making, of adulteration of fertilizers, and of introducing Coolie labor—which last is being seriously proposed at Washington—were not touched upon in our article.

Our correspondent commends the advice lately given by Mr. Armour, as we did in our article. He complains that our farmers are not thorough in their work, and that excellent farming lands in the East have been neglected and abandoned by farmers who "have gone West to look for fresh fields to skin"—points which we have ourselves repeatedly made.

In so far as he disagrees with our article on the question of drainage his disagreement is really with the Government report which we were quoting; and we cannot see that he convicts it of error. Drainage undoubtedly costs a good deal. But if through it land now quite unproductive can be made to yield returns of \$100 an acre, we must believe that it would be possible and profitable to have it done.

Finally, as to labor. There are myriads of able-bodied men who because of some slight defect—lack of weight, color-blindness, flat-footedness, loss of a finger or two, or what not—are unacceptable for the army but are perfectly capable of farm work. We trust that it will not be necessary to draft them for such work, but if it were, they would be taken "from the factories, from the banks, the post office," etc., just as much as but no more than those whom the Government will draft for the army. In drafting soldiers the Government will not destroy nor check those industries, and neither would it do so in drafting farmers, if it had to do so. It is true, as our correspondent says, that one now rarely sees a tramp. On the other hand the State Government of New Jersey last month announced that as a result of its official canvass it had registered more men and boys for farm work than it could find places for, and it urged land-owners to increase the amount of work on their places, either by tilling more land or by tilling it more thoroughly, so as to utilize this waiting and idle labor.

We have an idea that if our correspondent and we should get together at the shady end of our bean patch for a talk, we should find ourselves in amazingly close agreement.—EDITOR.]

LETTERS OF GERMAN SOLDIERS

SIR,—On page 837 of your JUNE REVIEW you make mention of a remarkable letter, replete with treason, found on a German prisoner, addressed to his wife. In your comment thereon you state further "that it was like scores and hundreds of letters that for some months have been coming into British hands—letters of wailing misery, letters of bitterest despair, letters of deep, of almost murderous anger against the German officers."

There are a few things about these letters found on German prisoners, exploited for some time by the American and British press evidently for the purpose of convincing the public that Germany is on the verge of a collapse, that I as a plain man cannot comprehend and would like to have a little more light from a man of your caliber and experience.

I have seen repeated statements that even in the American army, in war time, the soldiers are not at liberty to write what they please in letters to friends and relatives, and should they embody such treasonable utterances, imprisonment if not execution would speedily overtake them. Even civilians who slammed our President by slanderous speech have been nabbed by secret service men all through the country. The Allies too exercise a